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## Agricultural Support for the Old Colony Mennonites of Belize: A Collaborative Effort between North American Old Order Mennonites and a Cornell Extension Educator

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# **Agricultural Support for the Old Colony Mennonites of Belize: A Collaborative Effort between North American Old Order Mennonites and a Cornell Extension Educator**

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**Abstract:** The Old Colony Mennonites of Belize practice a conservative form of Anabaptism where technology, dress and lifestyle choices are informed by church standards. Members live in a spatially contiguous Colony, which creates land pressure over time as population increases. The development of new Colonies is necessary for the Mennonites to participate in agricultural livelihoods. The Indian Creek Colony of Belize has experienced agricultural and economic hardships since its inception in the 1989 due to land costs, crop failures and debt structure. Old Order Mennonites of North America developed an outreach effort to assist with on-farm production of vegetable crops to alleviate these hardships. The author was enlisted by an Old Order Mennonite Committee to visit greenhouse sites in the country and provide advice to ensure project success. Indian Creek farmers have adopted high tunnel greenhouse vegetable production, overcoming challenges such as high pH soils and pests. Large scale economic relief would require Colony wide investment and engagement. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** Low German Mennonites; greenhouses and wind-tunnels; tropical farming; migration; agricultural extension; outreach communication

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## PREFACE

This report is a narrative of my agricultural extension work with the Old Colony Mennonites of Indian Creek, Belize, from 2017-2021. For context, I am an agricultural Extension specialist with Cornell University in New York. For the last two decades I have provided production support to Old Order Mennonites, Amish, and non-sectarian farmers in the United States, with an emphasis on vegetables in field and greenhouse settings. In addition to these domestic responsibilities I have worked in Latin America and elsewhere internationally on the same topics, with fluency in Spanish and minor working knowledge of Pennsylvania German. This service provider report contains some agricultural jargon, as well as cultural observations; it is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of either. I avoid referencing individuals by name.

## ORIGINS OF THE OLD COLONY MENNONITES IN BELIZE

The country of Belize is on the eastern coast of Central America. Having a British colonial past, it is the only English speaking country in the region, though many Spanish speakers live throughout the country side because of immigration from neighboring Mexico and Guatemala. Additionally, numerous groups of Anabaptists are in the country, including Platt Deutsch-speaking Low German Mennonites, such as the Old Colony Mennonites, who migrated from Mexico to Belize. Economic conditions for these populations are challenging due to weather-related crop failures and debt load.

The Old Colony Mennonites are a distinctive Anabaptist group that emphasize separation from the world through church regulations that limit members' use of technology, participation in worldly activities, and proscriptions on secondary education, worship, and dress. Distinct from other Anabaptist groups, Old Colony Mennonites, as with other Low German Mennonites, employ a spatial separation by creating a contiguous colony where members own land, used for farming or home-based businesses. Low German Mennonite migrations from Prussia, Russia, Canada, Mexico, and points farther south reflect internal divisions, with the conservative groups often emigrating (Werner 2016).

In Belize, the Indian Creek Old Colony Mennonites are an example of this process. In a project newsletter, an Old Order Mennonite from Missouri described the geographic and cultural movement of the Indian Creek Mennonites:

As in our Church groups, they have multiplied to numbers that are difficult to sustain in their traditional farming lifestyle causing land shortages within the colonies which the poor cannot afford... There are large numbers of the conservative Old Colony Mennonites that have resisted progressive trends and separated themselves by moving south to Southern Mexico, Belize and Bolivia where they still drive horse and buggy, farm with steel wheel tractors and have no electricity or telephone (Shirk 2019).

One of the primary progressive trends that fueled these divisions was the acceptance of automobile ownership in the colonies of northern Mexico. The Old Colony Mennonites of Indian Creek, Belize owe their origins to the Shipyard Belize Colony which was established in 1958 from Old Colony Mennonites emigrating from Mexico (Roessingh and Bovenberg 2016). Indian Creek was established from the Shipyard Colony in 1989.

The combination of steel wheel tractors for farming purposes, horse-and-buggy for primary transportation, and distinct dress patterns exist in both the Old Order Mennonites of the United States (Groffdale and Mid-West Conferences) and the Old Colony Mennonites of southern Mexico and Belize. Although separated by time, geography, language, and church organization, these affinities likely contribute to the connection and commitment described herein. However, distinctions abound. Old Colony Mennonites live contiguously with land ownership in the Colony, which is attached to church membership, which creates spatial separation from surrounding people, as the Colony is remote and culturally homogenous. Alternatively, Old Order Mennonites select property as individuals and live mixed amongst other peoples. Old Colony Mennonites are often unable to speak the local languages in their countries and have school instruction in German. Old Order Mennonites are fluent in English and use it as their de facto written language and for school instruction. Linguistically the two groups are able to employ High German, with the Old Colony

**TABLE 1: SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN OLD ORDER AND OLD COLONY MENNONITES**

<b>Mennonite Cultural Attribute</b>	<b>Old Order Mennonites of North America</b>	<b>Old Colony Mennonites of Belize</b>
Primary transportation	Horse and buggy	Horse and buggy
Farming	Tractors on steel wheels	Tractors on steel wheels
Dress- Men	Dark pants, suspenders, solid or modest prints, collared shirts, straw hats (work), black felt or crushable hats (Sunday)	Dark pants or black bib overalls (most common), suspenders, solid or modest prints, collared shirts, straw/cowboy hats
Dress-Women	Full length dress with solid or modest print, cape (formal) or apron (informal), cap-style head covering with ties, bonnet with fringe (formal)	Full length dress with solid or modest print, cape (formal) or apron (informal), kerchief covering, large white hat (work or travel), bonnet or black embroidered kerchief (formal)
Spatial distribution	Property is privately owned with members scattered over a given geography (“settlement”); residences mixed among non-members; scale of settlement controlled by distance to institutions such as neighbors, church, school, and public services such as stores; private land is secured to build schools and churches	Property is owned first by church (colony), then sold to members; land ownership within the colony requires membership, creating a contiguous block of Mennonite land including roads created and managed by the colony; the colony plans and builds schools and churches; non-members may travel through the colony but do not own property or businesses therein
Geographic distributions	Canada and the United States	Primarily Latin America
Education	One room school houses of eight grades with instruction in English	One room school houses with instruction in High German; students required to complete years not grades

Mennonites having greater prowess in both spoken and written forms.

Though these two groups share the name “Mennonite,” they are part of two distinct Anabaptist traditions. The Low German Mennonites originated in the Netherlands and northern Germany. They take their name directly from Menno Simons, who joined the Anabaptists in the 1530s. The Swiss Brethren—today’s Mennonites of America and Canada (mostly Ontario)—originated in southern Germany and Switzerland beginning in 1525 (Anderson 2013). Table 1 summarizes some points of comparison today.

### **AGRICULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS FOR INDIAN CREEK**

As the Shipyard Colony in northern Belize became increasingly densely populated three decades after its establishment, the need for new land became clear. To create the much needed new community (Colony), 13,000 acres were purchased by Shipyard Old Colony Mennonites for 34 Belize dollars/acre (BZD/ac) in present day Indian Creek, nearly due south and adjacent to the Shipyard Colony (Belize dollars are fixed at a 1:2 ratio with U.S. dollars). The Indian Creek Colony then sold lots to interested members for 65 BZD/ac. An additional 2,700 acres was added to the col-

ony in subsequent years, purchased at 700 BZD/ac and resold to members for 900 BZD/ac. The church held the initial loan at a rate of 9%. From the beginning, the financial struggles of the new colony were obvious as members were not forthcoming in paying for parcels they had acquired. The colony incurred additional debts for crop inputs (fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides) for their collective dry bean *bodega*. Crop failures from drought in 2014 and 2015 resulted in insufficient cash flow to service a debt load of approximately 4 million BZD, with 12% annual interest. As of 2016, the colony reported accumulated debt of 5 million BZD and initial interactions with North American Old Orders included requests for lower interest loans (written communication, A. Shirk, Dec. 31, 2016):

As is typical to many Old Colonies they were not careful enough in borrowing money and making debt, then when hard times came they were in trouble” (Shirk 2019).

An anonymous letter explains more:

“For years we used to harvest regular to good crops, people got into the habit of procuring planting supplies like seeds, fertilizer and chemicals on credit from suppliers among us, who in turn bought said supplies again on credit from suppliers... On top of that people also borrowed money from D.F.C. [Development Finance Corporation] and other banks to finance their farming expenses. And then in the year 2013 our community also bought an additional tract of land, again with finance from D.F.C. Until 2014 people used to be able to more or less repay loans, but that year there was a drought, with poor crops as a result, and people could not repay debts. But credit remained easily accessible, so people took advantage of it and 2015 planted again. But that year the drought was really severe, so there was almost nothing to harvest, even less to repay debts. But apparently there being no other options to repay debts. [*sic*] than to try again, people once more borrowed and bought on credit as best as they could and where they could and again planted in 2016. And once again there was a drought and on top of that a Hurricane, the results once more a poor crop... On the whole, people have been too ready and willing to take out such risky loans that many cases could be considered as recklessness and ignorance. (Anonymous letter from Indian Creek to LA Share Committee, Sept. 19, 2018)

### EXISTING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NORTH AMERICAN PLAIN ANABAPTISTS AND CENTRAL AMERICAN OLD COLONY MENNONITES

Given this crisis, an outreach effort arose to help the Indian Creek colony with economically sustainable agricultural methods. As there already existed school support projects from Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites in the United States to Old Colony Mennonites in northern Mexico, existing contacts and networks contributed to the presence of myself and Old Order Mennonites offering agricultural support to Belizean Old Colony Mennonites.

Why were Old Order Mennonites involved in school projects with Old Colony Mennonites in northern Mexico? There was (and is) a perceived need for educational support tied to the dynamic that, as Old Colony Mennonites resist change, educational standards have not met the needs of students. The perceived need to find a key, or balance, between cultural tradition and effective primary education is evident in the writings of Old Order Mennonites themselves, as well as North American Mennonite academics. Discussing the stagnation of educational methods in Old Colony schools, a journal editor from Manitoba observed,

The historic methods of emphasizing tradition and migration have served their [Old Colony Mennonites'] purpose well in many contexts. But many, with and outside of the Old Colony churches in Latin America, have noted the problems in education. The dilemma for the Old Colony churches is that they have not found the key to [cultural] renewal through education without destroying the sense of community and common purpose that has shaped them. The Old Order Amish have found that key [...]. For the horse and buggy Old Colonists, this key to an improved education model that will renew without destroying them still eludes them (Friesen 2012-3).

This desire to help preserve cultural traditions while improving educational standards brought Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites from the United States into involvement with Old Colony Mennonite schools in Mexico via their Old Colony Mennonite Support (OCMS) program. OCMS supports home-based literacy, school cur-

riculum, teacher training, and distribution of the magazine reader *Geschichten Aus Dem Alttag*, written and printed by Old Order Mennonites in the United States. This educational effort also has an implicit spiritual mission: to nurture a Christian lifestyle among Old Colony Mennonites. Other North American-based Amish and Mennonite organizations also provide relief-oriented assistance to Old Colony Mennonites, including the Latin America Mennonite Project (LAMP) and the Beachy Amish-Mennonite Church's Mexico Mennonite Aid (MMA) program, which combine educational, business, agricultural, and monetary support with implicit spiritual goals.

### FORMAL OUTREACH INITIATED

The organizational infrastructure and relations developed to support the Old Colony Mennonites with education eventually led to support for agricultural sustainability. The literary outreach, as well as requests for business assistance from Belize Old Colony Mennonites to U.S. Old Orders, initiated correspondence between the Indian Creek Colony and Old Order Mennonites from Missouri, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. The correspondence demonstrated a need for agriculture support and, in 2017, led to the establishment of the LA SHARE Belize project. The committee of Old Order Mennonites (Groffdale Mennonite Conference) is comprised of five men from Kentucky, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and New York. The impetus for assistance is described by a committee member:

While some of these colonies eventually prospered, many are struggling and running out of land faster than they can get it paid for. This causes them to seek cheap land which is too often discovered to be less than ideal after it is cleared, making it very difficult to eke out a living, causing many to be very poor. This is the case in Indian Creek Colony in Belize, which lies just south of the mother colony, Shipyard, where they established from in 1989. Here is where our correspondence began which led to the founding of LA Share project (Shirk 2019).

The LA SHARE Project has the following Statement of Purpose:

- To assist Old Colony Mennonites with economic development

- To assist Old Colony Mennonites with humanitarian [*sic*] aid
- To offer sound reading material and assist with education
- In all ways working in harmony with the Old Colony Mennonites to their betterment and Biblical well-being. (Weaver 2019)

In January of 2018, LA SHARE purchased and shipped four soil-based greenhouses (high tunnels) to Indian Creek Colony with an understanding of delayed loan repayment. The greenhouses are intended for the production of vegetables during months of lower supply caused by the rainy season of tropical Central America.

In a written correspondence between the Old Colony Mennonites of Indian Creek and the LA SHARE committee, an Indian Creek writer lamented the economic situation and appeared receptive to the overture of help from the north:

In the last few years the harvest fell to almost nothing, except those that had irrigation systems had success. So I often pondered to and fro for a solution for those which have too little land or can't afford an irrigation system. Produce is not being farmed much here except some tomatoes are being planted in the winter, the rest of the time they are imported from Mexico to fill the demand. Up to now we had no knowledge about green houses/high tunnels, but might this be an answer for our people so they need not keep piling debt upon debt. At this time the future looks bleak for our people, especially for the men who have been appointed by the church to oversee the supplies for the farmers...this is the reason for writing you, that the above mentioned men have requested that I ask advice from you-if you might be able to help us? How can we move forward without losing the old ways?" (Ens 2019).<sup>1</sup>

### CORNELL UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION INVOLVEMENT

As an agricultural extension worker in New York, I was recruited to provide assistance to the project. In 2017, during a farm visit with an Old Order Mennonite farmer in Yates County, NY, I learned about the LA SHARE project and expressed an interest in supporting the agricultural aspects of the work if possible, given my back-

ground with Old Orders, tropical agriculture, greenhouse vegetables, and Spanish fluency. After multiple conference calls with the committee, I agreed to travel by air to Belize to assess the potential for greenhouse production of vegetables in Indian Creek as well as several other colonies. My ability to travel by air and use cellular communication represented a level of technology unavailable to the committee members who were all Old Order Mennonites. These men, having traveled several times to Belize, required nearly two weeks to complete the overland route, whereas, for me, a 6:00 a.m. flight had me eating lunch with Old Colony Mennonites on the same day. I was also able to use email and photos to expedite communication and transactions related to the delivery of agricultural inputs to Belize from the United States.

A committee member described my involvement this way:

We feel fortunate to have been offered assistance of Judson Reid, Cornell University New York state agronomy specialist. Judson offered to go and help the Mennonites with fertility, soil tests diseases, etc. He is fluent in Spanish which helped in communicating with the Old Colony Mennonites.” (Weaver 2019)

Although the project occurs within a formalized religious context, my role is to provide horticultural advice. I receive no compensation for my time; however, travel expenses are covered by the LA SHARE committee and my hosts in Belize. The primary scope has been within greenhouse vegetables, but community level challenges around field crops such as maize and beans also receive some of my attention. My university has been supportive of this work.

Arrangements were made between the committee and contacts in Indian Creek for an initial assessment visit. I departed from the Buffalo, NY, airport on March 7, 2018, for Belize City airport, Belize. I was met by several Old Colony Mennonites as well as their driver, a native of Guatemala. Similar to Old Order Mennonites and Amish in the United States, Old Colony Mennonites regularly employ outsiders for taxi service. In this case, the airport is a 90-minute drive from the colony.

Communication was in Spanish for the remainder of my trip, with occasional English and

German. Over the course of one week and accompanied by my hosts, I visited farms throughout Indian Creek Colony with the intent of assessing the potential for greenhouse vegetables in the region. In addition to the Indian Creek Colony, I visited other Old Colony Mennonite colonies, including Shipyard, Neuland, Little Belize, and Salamanca (Mexico), to assess the agricultural situation.

An excerpt of my observations from this trip follows. Upon my return, these observations and supporting photographs were shared with the U.S. committee for their own decision process on how to best support the Indian Creek farmers. I wrote,

Observations this day (March 8): considerable Early Blight, bacterial disease and leaf miner damage on field tomatoes. Downy Mildew on cucumber. Whitefly and virus on peppers. Soil is low in organic matter and cracks under dry conditions. Farmers have plenty of pesticides but not fully educated on their use. If their water pH is high, these materials may not be effective. Stopped for some delicious fresh coconuts.

After this trip, the U.S. committee shipped, via ocean freight container, four greenhouses to cooperating growers in Indian Creek, with an understanding that the cost was a no-interest loan with flexible repayment options, (I do not participate in the financial details of the LA SHARE Committee). I was able to provide support communication between the United States and Belize for the delivery and establishment of the greenhouses and crops via phone, fax, email, and social media platforms such as Whatsapp.

After the Old Colony Mennonites received the greenhouses and undertook their first cropping cycle, I was again deployed for one week in May 2019 to Indian Creek to observe the project's progress and challenges. Three of the four greenhouses had been built and were in use. During that trip, my geographic scope was narrowed to working entirely within the Indian Creek Colony. My daily activities were comprised of farm visits where, using Spanish and Platt Deutsch translators, I observed production challenges and suggested solutions. Transportation to the sites was provided by horse and carriage, with lodging and meals within the colony. The greenhouses were being used to grow tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers, which were marketed within the Indian Creek Colony,

neighboring Shipyard, and the Blue Creek Colony. Some products found their way to the Belizean city of Orange Walk.

In my report to the U.S. committee, I wrote:

I observed that the ridge vent at each of the 3 greenhouses was clogged with dust and/or algae, resulting in poor airflow. Options to address heat:

- Only grow during ‘off-season’ when there is an easterly breeze and cloudier skies; with a heat tolerant cover crop during hottest part of year.
- Place fans in the western gables and louvers in the east; these can be solar powered, with [name] skilled at the installation of these panels.
- Remove end wall plastic above door level and install insect netting to the bottom of cross pieces; in this case orient greenhouse E-W to maximize airflow.
- Forego insect netting altogether on side walls.
- Consider misters or wetting of insect net on side walls for evaporative cooling.
- Raise greenhouse with several feet of pipe.
- Remove insect netting from ridge vent for complete airflow.
- Apply shade cloth or shade paint to greenhouse plastic. [...]

As long as we are aware of this and remove the crop in a timely fashion, and manage pests, we can still have profitable greenhouses... This project offers the promise of stabilizing income for Old Colony Mennonite families. The Indian Creek Colony itself faces a very high debt due to the combination of land acquisition, drought and high interest loans.

After another half year had passed, I made a third visit to Indian Creek Colony January 21-24, 2020. The purposes of that trip were to assess the progress and identify challenges with the high tunnel greenhouses on the four operations selected by the LA SHARE committee, to provide solutions to overcome production challenges, and to provide consultation on other horticultural crops at neighboring farms. All four greenhouse were pro-

ductive to varying degrees. The goal of producing high quality produce during the rainy season (June-December) was being achieved, although site-specific challenges—including moisture, soil pH, and pest pressure—required attention. Communication on progress of the Old Colony Mennonites was shared with the committee via conference calls and individual meetings. Typical advice from my third trip report to the committee included the following:

With all growers [...] I reviewed their fertilizer and acid rates and made suggestions for improvement. In several cases we needed to increase potassium, particularly at [name]. We visited a local farm store and he bought a 100 lb bag of sulfate of potash to address this. We developed a more precise rate for N-P-K with regular sulfuric acid injection to keep his pH and calcium at bay. He may need to apply foliar potassium given the elevated soil calcium levels. He was on a very intense spray schedule (insecticide and fungicide at times as often as once every 3-4 days); we discussed reducing this to once a week and combining his materials and rotating through active ingredients. We want to keep nitrogen consistent to achieve high yields, but too much N in a tropical environment will decrease yield. His watering appears to be on target... His family has increased their income several thousand dollars (in Belize this is a lot). They are pleased and grateful for our project.

## REFLECTIONS ON MY WORK IN BELIZE

Although there are significant distinctions between North America’s Old Order cultures—with whom I have worked most closely—and the Belizean Old Colony Mennonites, hopefully my decades of experience contributed to some level of success in Belize. Effective outreach efforts are built on relationships between the service provider and farmer. My intention is to first understand the individual and collective motivations of my audience, which places their goals on a project horizon. Next these goals must be understood and achieved within the church boundaries on technology and lifestyle. For example, community standards may prohibit the use of electricity to power fans required for greenhouse ventilation, in which case alternative, acceptable solutions, such as gable or roof vents, are implemented. After looking at

goals and church standards, the operational context, including resources (land, animals, inputs, etc) and economic realities (access to capital, debt levels, market prices, etc.), influences the outreach offered.

However, working knowledge of the individual, church, and national context is not enough to be successful in agricultural extension. The farmers must feel comfortable with the individual service provider in order to receive and adopt the consultative advice. My own conduct with the audience would ideally include personal humility and modesty, coupled with practical technical knowledge of the agricultural sciences. Appropriate humor is another important tool to reduce communication barriers and kindle individual comfort and confidence between the service provider and farmer. Indeed, these concepts can be well applied to non-Old Order audiences for agricultural extension workers in North America and beyond.

A dynamic interface between agronomics, weather, finance, and church organization contributed to the crisis in Belize. The debts incurred during the initiation of a Colony coupled with collective marketing increased vulnerability to crop failures from drought or hurricane. The vast quantity of forest removal, along with nutrient dense topsoil, left the new farmers with poor soil resources further increasing their dependence on crop inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides, further driving the debt cycle. As described by an Indian Creek farmer,

Our colony of 13,000 acres at that time and also 3,000 acres which was added a few years ago, was grown up in a big forest and had to be cleared off with bulldozers before it could be farmed. Most of our people try to make a living with farming. They grow corn, beans sorghum, rice, etc. (Ens 2019).

Given this community-wide agricultural crisis, I was also engaged on broad, field level agriculture. I reflected on how the rapid establishment of the Colony on former forestland and farming practices contributed to their risk in my report to the LA SHARE committee,

Long term care of soil does not appear to be a priority among the Indian Creek farmers. The original land clearing process is deleterious as forest and top soil are cleared by bull dozers, then burned. Burning at the end of a crop cycle

to remove debris is common. This practice depletes what little organic matter is left. The result is a very low organic matter soil, with little visible soil life, such as worms, or other macroinvertebrates. Logically, soil microbes are at low levels as well. This creates poor nutrient cycling between the crop and soil; as well as higher pest vulnerability. There were no cover crops being grown, and rotations do not include sods or small grains, as cattle are pastured and not hay-fed. This production cycle also excludes the possibility of applying manure. This all leads to a cropping system that depends entirely on chemical-nutrition, which is expensive for the Belizeans. Fields that are not being actively cropped are allowed to grow to weeds, which contribute to further pest problems and return nothing to the soil. Introducing cover crops, between the cash crops could greatly benefit these farmers. These would need to be heat and drought tolerant varieties. Incorporating residue from corn or bean crops is also advised. This mind-set of continually improving soil health would also benefit the greenhouses [...]. A leguminous cover crop such as alfalfa or sun hemp would be better than leaving the soil completely dry along with occasional large weeds.

## DISCUSSION

Over the three years of this project, Old Colony Mennonite families made economic and social gains. Farmers reported increased gross revenue by several thousand dollars through the sales of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. Interestingly, most of these sales are within Indian Creek or neighboring colonies instead of the originally intended city and tourism markets. The population center of Orange Walk (population approximately 13,000) was an original target market. However, as Mennonite-operated stores within the colonies were receptive to the product, they offered lower shipping costs and proximity for the farmers.

An Old Order Mennonite produce farmer from the United States drew a parallel to the new produce farmers in Belize: “Much is the same as we [Old Order Mennonites] experience here in the U.S. as they learn to grow quality produce; the markets are opening up with a high domestic demand” (Weaver 2021).

The farms that adopted greenhouse production have largely turned management over to young adults on-farm. These young people demonstrat-

ed optimism and enthusiasm, generally absent from other agricultural endeavors in the colony. However, these benefits are currently enjoyed by a small number of families. Colony-wide advances would require greater investment and marketing. Primary agricultural challenges include alkaline soils and water, heat and humidity, high pest pressure, and lack of adequate inputs. These and many other factors will influence the success of this ongoing outreach.

What's next for our work in Belize? Within two months of my last visit with the Indian Creek greenhouse growers, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted international travel. I have had intermittent communication from the growers in Belize via social media and email. With the easing of travel restrictions, the U.S. committee and I have planned a December 2021 visit to assess progress of the cooperating greenhouses and determine how to provide future support in their efforts to develop economically sustainable livelihoods.

I am grateful to the people that have facilitated my participation in this project both in the United States and Belize.

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#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Creek Colony farmers who participate and correspond with the LA SHARE committee do so as individuals, although there is informal group networking within the Colony on topics such as production, marketing and input procurement.

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